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UNCLAS COLOMBO 001507

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [CVIS](#) [ETRD](#) [CE](#) [MV](#) [ECONOMICS](#)

SUBJECT: Initiatives to facilitate business travel in Sri Lanka and Maldives

REF: SECSTATE 166108

1. SUMMARY: Post has implemented two programs specifically targeted at facilitating business travelers heading to the United States, the 'Safe and Speedy' and 'AMPACT' programs. Post is also far along in visa reciprocity negotiations with the GSL, which should result in increasing visa validity from one year to perhaps as much as five years. END SUMMARY

2. Post's Safe and Speedy program (S&S) was developed in the summer of 2003 in response to the Sri Lanka business community's request to reduce waiting periods for NIV appointments. 20 to 30 expedited appointments were reserved on Monday and Wednesday afternoons for regular travelers to the U.S. The program was discontinued during the slow season, once waiting periods were below two weeks, and reinstated in May 2004 as waiting periods increased. If an NIV applicant has traveled to the U.S. in the past three years and is traveling for business or tourism purposes, they received an S&S appointment on a first come, first served basis. A small minority of post's NIV applicants fit this criterion and most applicants that do are business travelers. Waiting periods in the summer of 2004 were as high as 7 weeks during July and August. S&S waiting periods were never over 2 weeks.

3. The Amcham Partnership for American Commercial Travel (AMPACT) program was developed by the consular section in conjunction with the economic/commercial section and the American Chamber of Commerce in Sri Lanka. The program went into effect during the summer of 2004 and is specifically targeted at Amcham members, many of whom do significant business in the U.S. To qualify for the program, the sponsoring company must have been a member in good standing of Amcham for at least the past three years. This avoids companies joining Amcham specifically to abuse this program. To sponsor an applicant, the company pays a small processing fee to Amcham.

4. There are two tiers to the program. The first tier is targeted at senior executive level, regular travelers to the U.S. To be a first tier traveler, the applicant must be a senior manager at the company and have traveled to the U.S. at least twice previously. First tier travelers are guaranteed an appointment for an NIV interview within one week of application, which are due at Amcham by Wednesday of each week. They are then given slots during S&S times and those applicants are generally processed first.

5. The second tier is targeted at mid-level executives with, at most, one previous visit to the U.S. These applicants are generally mid level managers of larger companies or senior managers of smaller companies. To qualify for this program, the applicant must have worked at the company for at least 6 months, they must have a significant business reason for travel and a letter from their CEO or Managing Director attesting to their long term value to the company's overall strategic or operational plans. Second tier travelers are also required to submit their documents to Amcham in person and sign in a logbook, entering their proposed travel dates. The embassy then coordinates with Amcham to ensure travelers check in with Amcham upon their return. Second tier travelers are also guaranteed appointments within one week.

6. By offering the AMPACT program, post gives corporate travelers more options to receive expedited appointments and receive value from their Amcham membership. At the same time, conoffs have more reliable information regarding cases that may be difficult to adjudicate. AMPACT applicants are in no way, implied or otherwise, guaranteed a visa. The AMPACT application only provides additional information for the adjudication process.

7. Post is fairly far along in the process of visa reciprocity negotiations with the GSL. Amcham members and other parts of the Sri Lankan traveling community are putting pressure on the GSL to work with the Embassy to extend visa expirations from one year multiples to (hopefully) five year multiples. The GSL is actually creating a new type a visa only for Americans to enable us to reciprocate. Moving to a five year visa program with Sri Lanka would hopefully ease the 30% increase in adjudications

in Colombo over 2003 and send a very pro business message to Sri Lankan companies. Post hopes to have reciprocity negotiations finalized within the next month.

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